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STATE FOR AF/W-EPLUMB AND INR/AA-BGRAVES, PARIS FOR GD'ELIA
AND RKANEDA, LONDON FOR RBELL

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TAGS: [ECON](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [IV](#)

SUBJECT: COTE D'IVOIRE: PHYSICIANS STRIKE

¶1. Public sector physicians were on strike September 4-13, demanding a two-fold wage increase. Responding to pressure from the government and public, the leader of the doctors' union (Syndicat des Cadres Superieurs de la Sante de Cote d'Ivoire - SYNACASS/CI) announced an eight-day suspension of the strike on September 13. The strike had shut down public health facilities, including emergency rooms, nationwide. Previously, the union went on a short-lived strike in August 2007 and reached agreement with the government to discuss salary demands by September 15.

¶2. While the physicians' main concern is a rise in salary, a union dispute also contributed to the strike. On September 3, the union's Secretary General, Dr. Magliore Amichia, was dismissed by the Court of Abidjan and replaced by a temporary administrator. The court took this action in a bid to resolve the union's leadership crisis, brought about when a faction broke away on April 7. The breakaway faction, led by Dr. Adama Sanogo, accused Amichia of violating union rules by serving as advisor to the Presidency. Amichia in turn accused the dissidents of seeking to expropriate land the union acquired years ago. SYNACASS/CI, which represents pharmacists, physicians, and veterinarians, began striking September 4 to demonstrate its opposition to the court's decision.

¶3. The government angrily announced on September 9 that the strike was illegal because the union had not provided 6 days notice as required by law. The government called on physicians to return to work while it reviewed their salary demands. The Appeals Court of Abidjan lifted union leader Amichia's suspension on September 10 while it considers the case. The Appeals Court is expected to render its verdict by September 20.

¶4. Responding to the crisis, Labor Minister Hubert Oulaye warned on September 12 that physicians who did not resume work would have their salaries cut off. Most Ivorians cannot afford private medical care and receive medical care at public hospitals. As a result of the strike, the Abidjan Military Hospital has been overwhelmed by the number of patients. There are no official statistics regarding deaths caused by the strike, but the press and media have reported that persons have died in the intensive care and emergency units due to the unavailability of doctors.

¶5. Workers, including other civil servants, have staged several strikes in recent months, arguing that their wages have been eroded by the increase in the cost of living. Demands for bribes from truck drivers and other types of corruption have pushed up the price of food and other essential goods. Ivorian consumers are accustomed to price

controls, which have kept some prices on imported goods artificially low. Lax enforcement of price controls coupled with new fiscal charges have also resulted in prices rising. Finance Minister Charles Koffi Diby told consumers' associations September 12 that the government will announce measures to stabilize prices, including an 18 percent VAT freeze on essential products such as rice, milk, and cooking oil.

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